

Foster parent training scheduled July 29-31 for Pine Belt region

July 13, 2016

A weekend of intense training for new foster parents is scheduled for July 29-31 at William Carey University in Hattiesburg.

The goal of the program, called Rescue 100, is to provide 100 more licensed foster homes to meet the needs of abused and neglected children in the Pine Belt area. Organizers hope to train 200 foster parents in Forrest, Lamar, Marion, Pearl River and Perry counties.

Four orientations are scheduled at county courthouses. Anyone interested in attending the weekend training must first attend an orientation. People may register at www.200millionflowers.org/rescue100.

Starting at 6 p.m. and lasting an hour, the orientations are scheduled as follows:

July 18, Marion County Chancery Court, Columbia;

July 19, Pearl River County Government Building, Picayune;

July 20, Lamar County Courthouse, Purvis;

July 21, Forrest County Chancery Court, Hattiesburg.

“Throughout the state, there is a shortage of foster homes,” said Mississippi Supreme Court Justice Dawn Beam of Sumrall. “We have children that need to be placed in foster care, and there is nowhere to place them.”

Justice Beam, chair of the Mississippi Commission on Children’s Justice, is spearheading organization of Rescue 100 programs to train foster parents.

Completing the licensing process used to take many months, with individual classes scheduled weekly. In an effort to address the need for more foster parents, Rescue 100 will pack into three days all the classes required for people to be licensed as foster parents. Child Protection Services or a private agency will follow up with complete home studies shortly afterwards.

The July 29-31 Rescue 100 program will be the second large scale training event. The Rescue 100 program began at Michael Memorial Baptist Church in Gulfport under the leadership of Pastor Tony Karnes. Sixty-five prospective foster parents complete the entire weekend of training April 15-17. About 30 foster homes are expected to be licensed in Harrison County as a result of the program, said Susie Q. Evans, Olivia Y. Settlement Coordinator for the Mississippi Department of Child Protection Services..

“We thought it was money well spent for the benefits we derived from the Coast event,” said Dr. David Chandler, executive director of the Department of Child Protection Services. “I think it is a good, cost-effective way to provide more and better services for the children.”

“We started in south Mississippi and we are working our way through the state,” Chandler said. A similar program will be held later this year to address the foster care needs in Hinds, Madison and Yazoo counties, he said.

A date for the central Mississippi program will be announced soon. More than 20 families are on the waiting list.

The Pine Belt area has the second greatest need for non-relative foster homes, surpassed only the Coast, Evans said. There are 302 licensed foster homes in Region 6, which includes Forrest, Lamar, Marion, Pearl River, Perry and Stone counties. However, only 152 homes are licensed for non-relative placement. Half of the foster care parents in the area are licensed only to care for

members of their own extended families.

There are more than 800 children in foster care in Region 6, Evans said.

“We are in dire need of non-relative foster homes. That’s why this program is so important because it focuses on non-relative foster homes,” Evans said.

As of May 31, children in foster care by county included:

Forrest County, 188;
Lamar County, 44;
Marion County, 217;
Pearl River County, 238;
Perry County, 38;
Stone County, 116.

Rescue 100 is a collaborative effort of the Mississippi Department of Child Protection Services; the Mississippi Commission on Children’s Justice; and adoption agencies including 200 Million Flowers, Mississippi Children’s Home Services and Southern Christian Services for Children and Youth. Area churches are invited to join the effort.

“This is Child Protection Services, the courts and the faith-based community all coming together to meet the needs of our children,” Justice Beam said.

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